*[The following long-answer essay questions will be obtained from class discussion. Those listed are idealistic, but may in fact be similar to what I would actually use to assess comprehension of the novel* Wolf in White Van*. Nonetheless, these questions may only be used for this test if the classroom reaches these topics in class. Therefore, the essay questions will come directly from the unique discussions of the students. These questions will be major objectives for the instructor to steer the discussion towards while* Wolf in White Van *is being discussed.]*

**SHORT ANSWER:**

**Answer the following 3 questions in a few words on a separate piece of paper.**

1. **Who is the author of *Wolf in White Van*** *–John Darnielle*
2. **In what year was *Wolf in White Van written?*** *-2014*
3. **Write an interesting fact about the author. –** *John Darnielle sings for the band “The Mountain Goats”, and has written numerous highly acclaimed albums. John Darnielle was a victim of severe child abuse at a young age, and he documents this in his album “The Sunset Tree”.*

**LONG-ANSWER ESSAY:**

**Choose two of the following essay questions, and respond in detail on (the same) separate piece of paper. Each response should contain a minimum of three paragraphs (though you may certainly write more). Each response should contain an introduction, body, and conclusion. Before you begin writing, you should think about your plan of attack. Your response should maintain fluency and purpose throughout. Good Luck.**

**1.** Sean does not shut down the game he created after it causes two young kids to lose their lives. When the case goes to court, Sean Phillips is determined “not guilty”. Why might Sean’s decision to continue running the game be expected? Also, why might this action be unexpected? Why do you think Sean is so intent on continuing to run Trace Italian?

*- Part of Sean’s reasoning for continuing to run Trace Italian has to do with literal, physical need. The Trace Italian is a big supplement to his income outside of insurance money, and it is known that Sean does not have excessive income. Outside of these literal reasons, the Trace Italian is the only part of Sean’s world that may show mercy, and certainly the only part which Sean is in control of. One might say that Sean’s life would be considerably blank without the Trace Italian.*

*-It is unexpected that Sean would continue his game because he is emotionally shattered after learning about the death of the two teenagers. Sean recalls writing to the two teenagers who played his game, he thought highly of them. In a way, he felt like a father figure to them – even though he never met them in person. Also, Sean made a decision while he was young that nearly destroyed him, and certainly had a negative effect on the rest of his life. Sean should be able to relate to the teenagers supernatural perception his game, which caused one of them to freeze to death digging a hole in the middle of the Kansas plains. Certainly, he made an equally destructive decision in his youth. Wouldn’t this provide him sympathy for the teenagers? Or perhaps it would do the opposite? Maybe he has faced the consequences of reality, due to his young decision to attempt suicide, and he recognizes these consequences as a brutal part of reality, which remains out of the control of anyone except the user. Though even to the user, reality is only controllable in the present tense, which slips away so easily.*

*- Sean is intent on continuing to run the Trace Italian because it allows him to exist in a separate world from his disfigurement. He also is allowed to play the ‘God role’ in other people’s decisions. People who play in Sean’s Trace Italian write to him, telling him what their character would do given a certain situation, and Sean gets to decide how this decision plays out, and what negative effects come from this decision. In a way, Sean’s determining of consequences for others gives him an opportunity to redeem his young decision to attempt suicide, which caused his disfigurement.*

**2.** What do you infer that *Wolf in White Van* is saying about past decisions and the person who makes them? If you were to describe Sean’s own feelings about his lifelong disfigurement, how would you describe his emotions? Is he conflicted? Does he *even* *have* a particular way of viewing himself?

*- One might say that* Wolf in White Van *is representative of a person’s inability to go back and change their own acts. This is a commonly used theme in literature and stories, but there is a deep connection to this theme in* Wolf in White Van. *Sean talks about how as an older man, he is not the same person he was five or ten years after the incident, he is also not the same person he was the day before the incident. Sean remarks about how the self constantly develops in versions of itself that may seem unrelateable retrospectively. Therefore, the Sean that attempted to kill himself at age 17 is not the same Sean that suffers from this decision thirty years later.*

*- Sean seems to never directly confront the topic of ‘regret’ pertaining to the incident and his own disfigurement. Sean speaks very matter-of-factly about the incident, which reinforces the idea that it was done by a former version of his self, which he no longer feels responsible for. Sean seems to treat his disfigurement as merely something that is unchangeable, permanent, and undeniable. It is what it is. This being said, it would be hard to infer that Sean does not regret the incident. Sean is isolated to his house for most of his life because of the horror that most people feel towards him. However, Sean also doesn’t seem like he wishes he could “go back and change his actions”, because frankly, he can’t. He doesn’t feel like he is still the same person who committed them.*

**3.** What is the difference between how Sean sees himself and how others see him? Consider the teenagers who he converses with in the back of a truck. Why is this scene significant? What is different about the way these teenagers treat Sean compared with the rest of society? When the teenagers in the truck first meet Sean, the reader assumes they are being rude (right?), though Sean doesn’t see it this way. Might this be a form of social commentary? How so? What other figures that we’ve studied also went through this split crisis of identity?

*-Sean views himself as a person who horrifies those who physically see him. This is a huge part of his identity. He makes strangers uncomfortable. He doesn’t seem to feel that this is justified, yet he totally understands it. He views himself as horrid and ugly and he doesn’t like when people ‘dance around’ this issue. When a stranger or friend pretends that his disfigurement is nonexistent, this angers him. This feels unnatural and fake to him.*

*-Due to this, the teenager’s seemingly rude gestures are well received. The first line the teenager says to him is this: “Dude.” “Your face.” Sean respects this, especially after it turns out that the rebellious teenagers are interested in having a long discussion. This genuine interaction that takes place as they sit and drink beers in the teenager’s truck bed represents reality, a part of reality Sean has a hard time finding anywhere outside of the Trace Italian. People don’t treat Sean as a real person; typically they treat him as an object of pity. Society has, and will, treat Sean in this manner for the entirety of his life. The incident with the teenagers provides a rare glimpse of Sean having a genuine social interaction, even though it occurs with a couple of teenage delinquents. This is unexpected yet it makes sense to the reader in retrospect. The reader is granted a clear image of two types of people who are rarely considered free of judgment by society at large. They immediately understand this of each other and connect.*

*-Perhaps this is saying something about the American cultural phenomenon which is: “The tendency to ignore blatant areas of unfairness or tragedy in common speech”. Though it is considered polite to approach a man who is disfigured and never mention it to him, perhaps this is ignoring reality. It is understandable that a person living in this condition would eventually be forced to go through their life without experiencing realistic connections with people because those they meet feel obligated not to mention the ‘big pink elephants’ in the room. The teenagers don’t do this to Sean, and Sean sees this as welcoming. Sean is aware that his voice and face are ugly, he cannot change this, and he has to live with this. Perhaps acknowledgment of this is better than denial.*

*-Sean’s condition is reminiscent of W.E.B DuBois’s “Twoness” which he referenced throughout* The Soul’s of Black Folk. *Sean is someone to society at large that he is not to those who participate in his mail-order game, Trace Italian. Many people act differently in different settings, it is a problem if individuals are not allowed to choose or control the setting.*

**4.** What do you think *Wolf in White Van* says about the effects of a person’s investment in their own imagination? Is there a comparison to be drawn between the ‘real world’ and the Trace Italian? Why might Sean find comfort in ruling over the Trace Italian?

-*Sean is not the only person who becomes overly invested in Trace Italian. Over the course of the novel, several others become entirely too invested in the game that Sean has created. There are a couple outcomes for these sorts of people who become overly invested. There is one player who simply quits because he knows he has gone too far (Chris Haynes). There is of course, also the teenagers (Lance and Carrie) who convince themselves the game is a reality and drive to Kansas and freeze to death trying to find the Trace Italian in reality. Essentially, the imagination is a great, comfortable place – however – one needs to be responsible for and aware of the consequences that come along with neglecting reality.*

*-The real world and Trace Italian exist based on similar rules. The nice part about the Trace Italian is that, mistakes within the fantastical realm may never cause actual pain. Mistakes within the Trace Italian are only permanent within the Trace Italian. A person can exit this forever if they so desire. However, mistakes in reality may be made just as easily, or just as stupidly, but do not equal in opportunities for redemption. Nobody asked to play the game of reality, yet we must play by the rules or face the consequences.*

*-In the Trace Italian, Sean is God. He’s not obsessed with this role. It’s merely his job and what he does, especially later in life. More than anything, the Trace Italian provides him a sense of independence, belonging, and in his case – reality. Sean’s interactions within the Trace Italian are more reflective of normal social behaviors than those he experiences in reality. He is allowed to connect and speak with real people without thinking about his disfigurement or having a need to mention it. It is irrelevant within the Trace Italian.*

**Under the following names of characters, list a few details pertaining to each person - a sentence or two is enough. I would merely like to place the way in which you envisioned each character. You may list your favorite attributes of each character, their interactions with the protagonist, or why they are important to the plot or themes within *Wolf in White Van*, et cetera. Points will be taken off for erroneous or unsupported information.**

**Sean Phillips –** *Sean is an island. He is disconnected from the real world because he cannot be treated as ‘normal’. He has long dealt with the consequences of his suicide attempt, though normalcy will never return to his life. His game, Trace Italian, becomes his place to simulate normalcy.*

**Lance and Carrie –** *Lance and Carrie are two young kids who play Trace Italian and become convinced that the mail-order RPG game is based in reality. They drive to Kansas from Florida and begin digging all night in order to find the secrets of Trace Italian. In a horrible accident, Carrie dies of exposure and Lance is severely injured due to his obsession with Trace Italian. Carrie’s family pursues legal action against Sean Phillips, though it fairly clear that they do not have a plausible case against him. Lance and Carrie were some of Sean’s favorite customers of the game, they were dedicated and very intelligent, they were very capable of analyzing theoretical scenarios and choosing the best outcome.*

**Chris Haynes –** *Chris Haynes originally represents Sean’s ideal customer. Chris was very dedicated to the game and wrote detailed letters to Sean explaining his next move in the game. He also was obsessed with Trace Italian. However, one day, he writes to Sean telling him he wants to pursue an option that is not one of the four pre-chosen options given to Chris for his turn. He tells Sean he wants his character to commit suicide. He does this because he is self-aware of how overly involved he is in Trace Italian. His character’s suicide is an exit from his addiction to caring about Trace Italian. (This could be explained as a metaphor for Sean’s own attempt at suicide, perhaps).This is early on in the creation of the game, before Lance and Chris. Sean mails Chris a certificate of death for his character.*

**Vicky (the nurse) –** *There isn’t much depth to Vicky, but she’s the only casual acquaintance of Sean. Of course, she is paid to make weekly visits to his house in order to treat his lasting wounds, yet they still have a small bit of friendship between them. There is no major relationship here, but it is clear to the reader that it is important to Sean because of his little interaction with the outside world.*

**Sean’s Mother/Father –** *Sean has a pretty crumby relationship with his parents. They saw his decision to attempt suicide as a blatant act against them. Throughout his life, it seems they never forgave him for disfiguring himself - this is odd because Sean hardly feels responsible for the act as an older man. Even before the incident, it seems Sean and his parents never connected in understanding.*